

2022-23 UC Systemwide Academic Senate Overview | By Susan Cochran, Senate Chair

See the [2021-22 Academic Council Annual Report](#) for highlights from last year

Setting the Stage for 2022-23**UC, State, National Context**

This year, like every new academic year for the Senate, is stuffed with both opportunities and challenges. We are now entering our fourth year of the pandemic. We've all learned the hard way that COVID will color our experiences this coming year in some ways that are predictable and others that are not. While other university systems saw large drops in enrollment, this wasn't true for the UC. But like other institutions, employees are restless and either moving on or seeking work accommodations that let them work from home. Students as well have fully embraced the idea of individualized learning options via a plethora of instructional modalities, and this has been embraced by legislators, Regents, and administrations. At the first 2022-23 Academic Council meeting on September 28, the Senate leadership will present the results of the third UC Systemwide Academic Senate Survey of Faculty and Instructors and then post it on the Senate website. Results show that many of us are struggling in our sense of connection to our home campuses. Here at the systemwide level, we also saw last year that shared governance was working better at UC Office of the President (UCOP) than on some of the campuses. This is why it is critical that we keep our lines of communication open.

Pandemic & Re-Opening Guidelines

Senate Vice Chair Jim Steintrager and I sit on a committee of epidemiologists and infectious disease specialists from across the campuses who spend much of their time planning for pandemic management of the campus settings. We learned many lessons last year. For one, offices on the campus whose job it is to arrange for learning accommodations for students were not always effective, causing issues for both faculty and students. Jim and I have raised the issue with the systemwide Provost in the hopes that we can get ahead of the problem this year. The second lesson is that our students needed more help learning how to be students again. Hopefully this year, with a year of in-person instruction under their belt, student skills related to learning engagement and social interactions will have righted themselves. The third lesson is that multiple modality teaching is an unsustainable workload for the faculty. Last year, then-Senate Chair Robert Horwitz and I repeatedly conveyed to the Board of Regents, the President, and the Provost that policies on the campuses surrounding instruction must be set by principles of broad consultation and fairness, that instructors cannot be asked to teach in multiple modalities without additional support or some recognition of the increased workload, and that instructors should not be put in the position of enforcing safety mandates.

Major Senate Initiatives for a Two-Year Agenda

There are at least six areas that will engage the Academic Senate over the next couple years.

1. Maximizing the quality proposition of online instruction

One is how do we make best use of online instruction? Prior to the pandemic, UC offered very little online instruction. But with our rapid pivot to remote instruction, many of us have seen the best and worst of what it has to offer. From the campuses, [UCEP](#) has so far received two proposals for online degrees. And we are seeing substantial pressure from Regents and the administration to increase access to the UC through the use of online instruction. Expect this issue to consume a lot of our attention going forward.

2. Access, growth, and inclusion at the UC

A second theme we are going to see is also related to growth of the undergraduate, and to some extent graduate, student body. Under the compact with Governor Newsom in the last budget cycle, the UC has agreed to grow by 20,000 students by 2030. However, the Regents would like to see 32,000 students or more. And campus administrations have responded by providing growth plans with little or no consultation with the divisional Senates. Outgoing Chair Horwitz expressed his concerns to the President about the fraying of [shared governance](#) processes on some of the campuses. Some of this I suspect is a result of the loss of community on the campuses as well the overgrowth of administrative operations where many are unfamiliar with the interlacing infrastructure of the University. Here, too, we can expect that the Senate will be called on to actively insert ourselves into the planning processes.

3. Coming back from the pandemic: Rebuilding UC excellence in the four pillars of research, mentoring, teaching, and service

This year hopefully we can spend more time broadening the discussion about how to come back from the pandemic. How do we recreate community when many faculty and staff remain online while others are in person, and when many do not want to work in person? Is there the same commitment to the institution when a lot of it is online? How can we rebalance faculty workload to embrace research and mentorship after three years of devotion to instructional needs? Regents, the President, and many administrators speak of expanding University access through an expansion of an online footprint allowing for hybrid instruction and higher student/faculty ratios. At the same time, the Academic Senate's recent faculty survey and other research across the country suggests that student engagement is not the same in remote vs. in-person teaching. Faculty themselves report that they are challenged to find the time to conduct research and mentor graduate students and other trainees with all the time demands of pandemic-affected instruction. It is up to us to make a convincing case that protecting faculty's engagement with the full mission of the University matters at the UC. To that end, we are working with the outgoing Provost to create a joint Senate-Administration workgroup that will focus explicitly on recommendations to restore the balance of faculty commitment to research, mentoring, teaching, and service.

4. Relationship between medical centers and general campus

We are also going to continue the proactive profile begun last year with respect to two other issues. The first is to examine the role of UC Health and the health services enterprise in terms of the overall UC mission and profile, especially the relation of the hospitals to the general campuses, and especially around those financial relationships. Last year, [UCPB](#) began to work through an understanding of fund flows between health enterprises and academic medical settings. The work will continue this year. In addition, [UCFW](#) and [HCTF](#) will continue to work on health care and insurance issues of concern to the faculty. One of the points these committees made last year to UC Health and UCOP Human Resources is that employee benefits are employee benefits and should be optimized for that purpose.

5. Climate crisis

Last year the [Assembly of the Academic Senate](#) passed and delivered a climate memorial to the President to convey to the Regents. This petitioned the Regents for investments in UC's infrastructure that will reduce on-campus fossil fuel combustion by at least 60% of current levels by 2030 and by 95% of current levels by 2035. While the UC did not receive capital funds to undertake this work in the last budget cycle, this fall, they are beginning a process of planning for the eventual electrification of the campuses. A workgroup of the Global Climate Leadership Council (which the systemwide Senate leadership sits on) has started planning work on what will likely be a huge, expensive, and highly political undertaking. This year's state budget has also allocated \$185M to the UC, \$85M to three campuses (UCSC, UCR, UCM) for climate-related efforts, and \$100M to UCOP to support faculty-driven climate research.

6. Increasing Senate visibility and Senate service

Finally, we also need to focus on rejuvenating the Senate by increasing its visibility on the campuses and systemwide and restoring a commitment to Senate service. Many of the divisional Senates are having trouble filling committees. While Senate leaders are elected representatives of the faculty, our work is often invisible to the faculty. Indeed, in the Senate's 2021-22 faculty survey, faculty reported lowest levels of satisfaction for instructional help last year from their own Senate, lower even than from their administration. I hope we can improve communications about the Senate's work in the year ahead. And it is important that we recruit new faces to Senate service. We need to grow the Senate's ranks so that we better represent all of our constituents.